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The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Female Genital Mutilation in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Executive Summary
Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is one of the most brutal forms of violence imposed on women by the name of religion, tradition and customs. Although FGM is generally associated with the African countries but the practice, though not as widely, still exists in some northern west, west and southern parts of Iran and for that in many other non-African countries.
This report highlights the degree, the type, method and underlying reasons of genital mutilation of girls and women in the Kurdish regions and parts of the southern ports of Iran (Hormozgan province).

FGM in the Kurdish regions

The Kurdish regions of Iran include Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Ilam and south parts of western Azarbaigan province. The majority of the Kermanshah and Ilam population are Shi'as while most of the Kurds in Kurdistan and western Azerbaijan provinces are Sunnis of Shafi'i branch of Islam. Although FGM is widely practiced between Shafi'is, the practice lacks a blanket pattern. In some rural areas it is more or less done on girls, while in the neighbouring villages no one is even aware of it. For example in Kermanshah province, in the Gheshlagh village of Mansour Aghaie regions FGM is practiced, while in the Tazeh Abad of Seryas village, part of Ravansar town no case had been reported.

FGM in the Hormozgan region

Hormozgan is one of the most deprived and poorest states of Iran situated on the strait of Hormoz at the end mouth of the Persian Gulf. Hormozgan is one of the provinces in Iran where FGM is still practiced. The majority of the population are Sunnis of the Shafi'i branch. FGM statistics vary from 70% to 80% among female population. A percentage of neighbouring Shia'at population practices FGM in case their daughters would later marry a Sunni.

The state policy towards FGM

Various groups of civil society activists and NGOs who have carried out research on FGM, have sent their reports to the relevant government agencies, including ministry of health, province governors' offices and the health centres urging them to take steps to eradicate the practice. Unfortunately, justifications such as religious sensitivities among the majority Shi'as and the minority Sunni population, who mostly practice FGM, and fear of conflict has prevented any cooperation and action.

Voluntary efforts of activists to inform and eradicate FGM among women & girls

In the situation of denial and non-cooperation by the government, some activists and NGO's in various regions have started to campaign against FGM through house to house visits, talking to people specially mothers who are the main actors in mutilation of their daughters and informing them of the danger and consequences of FGM. Although these activities have not been continues but they have had an important impact in the reduction rate of FGM in the Kurdish regions.[1]

Reasons behind the FGM

In Iran, religion is the main factor to the practice. Due to some of the interpretations of Shafi'i Figh (directives), FGM is as a necessity as circumcision in men. Mullah, Mohammad Rabi'ie[2], a distinguished clergy in Kurdistan believes: "FGM is one of Prophet Ibrahim's traditions. It is a mandatory practice, although some believe it is not, and among the population can be classified as 'Sunat-tradition'[3]. It must be explained that Sunat here means 'mandatory practice', not

[1] Most of the information was taken from Fatemeh Karimi's book in titled of "The Tragedy of Body" & Rayeheh Mozaferian's book in titled of "Razor & Tradition" and her articles.
[2] Mohammad Rabiie (1370), Baghiat Al-Salehat, P. 180, Third Edition, Payam Publications.
[3] In Islam, there are two basic rules to be followed: Figh teachings are obligatory and Sonat which is voluntary.

a Sunat which is voluntary (among the 5 voluntary practices in Islam)." The common belief of the followers of this faith is that a woman will become a Muslim when she is circumcised. Everything she does is then Halal (accepted by Muslims). Apart from this, woman's sexual desires will be under control and her vagina looks prettier.
In these societies, FGM facilitates marriage as "the woman has less sexual desire and therefore, remains virtuous, pure and under the control of her husband and his family".

FGM methods

In the Shafi'ie religious texts, when a woman has developed enough she should be circumcised. Within the families and especially the mothers (who are mostly in charge of the practice) the tendency to carry it out when the girls are young (4-10) can be noticed. At an early age, the girl will have less bleeding and pain and will forget the trauma quicker. Yet, there is no blanket pattern. For example, in Kamyaran in Kurdistan, female infants are circumcised in the first 40 days after birth. Yet, there had been instances, where the girl had been circumcised before marriage as a necessity.
The practice is often carried out by local midwives (dayeh), mothers and experienced women in the family, with the least of hygiene and without anesthetises. Shaving razor is used to cut the designated piece; Betadine[4] is used for cleansing, and the ash from burnt branches, to stop the bleeding. In some instances circumcision is done collectively and one razor is used on several girls. The practice would last about 10-20 minutes and in clandestine.

Types of FGM

According to World Health Organisation, FGM in Iran is of the two types:

A) Cutting the tip of the clitorises
B) Cutting parts of the labia minora or all of it in addition to the tip of clitorises

The severity of the mutilation and its type depends on the practitioner.

There are two types of girls who would not be circumcised:

1- Having possessed a small clitorises, who is believed she had been circumcised by angels before the birth.
2- In some instances mothers who have had painful memory of the practice or the girls themselves refuse to do it. In such cases, to clear a guilty conscience they tear the girl's collar dress with a razor or pass the razor 7 times through her collar.

Consequences of the FGM

Genital mutilation in women and girls brings about short term as well as long term hazards. It endangers the physical health of women and their psychological well-being: fear of blades, bleeding, virginals infections, lack of urine control, and formation of cysts and abscess and painful sexual intercourse are associated with the FGM.

FGM in Iran: how widespread it is?

In addition to Kurdish regions and south of Iran, there are also reliable statistics on cases of FGM in Khoram Abad, Aleshtar and Kuhdasht of Lorestan province as the 6th province where FGM is documented. We believe that the practice might be implemented in other regions of the country as well. However, there are no official statistics on the practice nationalwide.
Some evidences collected from women especially in Kurdish regions suggest that new cases are on the decline. Reasons can be summarised as below:

a) Increase in the number of women in higher education
b) Positive effects of Kurdish media outside Iran, especially in the Iraqi Kurdistan which highlight the devastating consequences of FGM for women by WADI Organization.
c) Modern interpretation of religion and classic texts in the same region. In 2009, some high ranking clergies issued Fatwas, banning the FGM.
d) Reduction in the number of local midwives and other domestic experts in cutting genitals. They have either died or are old enough not to practice and few new recruits have volunteered.

[4] Antiseptic iodine tincture (Povidone Iodine) which is widely used in Iran.

c) Activities of a number of women activists and NGOs in Iran in informing the public of the dangers and the consequences of FGM.

Recommendations

Civil society activists have little or no financial resources to publicise the dangers of FGM or to be able to gather national statistics on the issue. We urge the Islamic Republic of Iran

- To accept the fact that FGM is practiced in Iran and to take active steps to eradicate it. Health clinics which exist in many rural areas are a suitable place to start with.
- Using social media, especially TV to inform people of the dangers and consequences of FGM through popular programmes and documentaries.
- Seeking approval and the agreement of the local clergy and religious leaders and head of tribes to issue bans on the practice.